



LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVES

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Preservation, Restoration, Education and Recreation

**DATE:** October 5, 2015

**MEMO TO:** Carol Calabresa, Chair  
Land Preservation and Acquisition Committee

Bonnie Thomson Carter, Chair  
Planning and Restoration Committee

S. Michael Rummel, Chair  
Finance and Administrative Committee

**FROM:** Randall L. Seebach, Director  
Planning and Land Preservation

**SUBJECT:** USACE Phase I Flood Control Feasibility Study – Van Patten Woods Reservoir

**REQUEST:** Provide policy direction regarding a request from the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to construct a flood storage reservoir at Van Patten Woods Forest Preserve, and to authorize execution of a letter stating that the District is no longer interested in participating in the planning and implementation of the reservoir project.

**BACKGROUND:** As a result of two major storm events in 1986 and 1987, causing over \$100 million in damages along the upper Des Plaines River in Cook and Lake Counties, the USACE began a Phase I Risk Management Study in 1989 that identified 6 sites along the river for possible reservoirs and levees (three in Cook County and three in Lake County). The study sites in Lake County were all on District property and included a possible expansion of the existing reservoir at Buffalo Creek Forest Preserve, a modification to the then-existing Rasmussen Lake dam along North Mill Creek at Ethel's Woods Forest Preserve and a Lateral Storage Facility at Van Patten Woods Forest Preserve.

The original study resulted in a plan that impacted up to 200 acres of Forest Preserve property including the creation of spoil piles up to 45 feet high, holes 35 feet deep, and overall designs that resembled a large bath tub. The original lateral storage concept for Van Patten Woods called for 1 ½ miles of 20-foot high earth levee paralleling the river. As a result of environmental, recreational and aesthetic concerns, the District's Board passed a resolution in January 1997 unanimously opposing the plan for Van Patten Woods.

Over the next fourteen years, the USACE continued to investigate alternative solutions for flood storage at Van Patten Woods. In March 2011, the District received an invitation from the USACE to participate in the design process for a possible reservoir at Van Patten Woods. The following month (April 2011), the District's Standing Committees approved a Policy Direction, with some reservation, authorizing staff to participate in the planning of a possible Van Patten Woods reservoir. The Committees' concerns included the unavailability, at that time, of significant design information or information on the downstream benefits and environmental impacts, all of which is necessary to make a decision on the feasibility of the reservoir project.

Pursuant to that Policy Direction, over the past several years, staff has participated in several meetings with the USACE and reviewed alternative reservoir designs and additional information on downstream benefits and potential impacts to Van Patten Woods. Several concerns remain including: 1) the proposed design does not have a natural appearance, 2) the downstream benefits to existing structures would not be substantial and 85% of the benefits appear to be transportation-related in the form of reductions in traffic

delays and detours resulting from flood-induced road closures, 3) it is unclear how many residential and commercial structures would benefit and in what capacity, 4) it is uncertain who would pay for the land rights to construct and operate the reservoir (IDNR is currently listed as the local sponsor) 5) it is uncertain who would be responsible for the annual operation and maintenance of the reservoir (currently estimated at over \$100,000) 6) it is uncertain who would cover the 35% local share (currently estimated at \$3 million) of the construction cost, and 7) the existing special use area, including the model aircraft field and the group camping, would need to be re-located or closed.

After extensive review of the design alternatives, potential impacts, and the above concerns, staff has concluded that the relatively small flood relief benefit to existing structures are not significant enough to warrant the extensive long term impact to Van Patten Woods Forest Preserve. Therefore, staff is seeking authorization to send a letter to the USACE stating that the District is no longer interested in participating in the planning or implementation of the reservoir project at Van Patten Woods.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:** Policy Direction is required in accordance with District policy.

**REVIEW BY OTHERS:** Executive Director, Chief Operations Officer, Director of Finance, Legal Counsel

**FINANCIAL DATA:** At this time there is no financial impact.

**PRESENTER:** Randall L. Seebach